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ABC-IRAN-BODIES:330

URGENT

HINT IRAN MAY DEMAND PAYOFF FOR THE BODIES OF U.S. SERVICEMEN.

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A LEADING IRANIAN NEWSPAPER SAID SUNDAY THAT THE BODIES OF EIGHT AMERICANS KILLED IN THE ABORTIVE U.S. COMMANDO MISSION TO FREE THE HOSTAGES SHOULD BE HELD IN IRAN UNTIL WASHINGTON RELEASES IRANIAN ASSETS FROZEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

AN EDITORIAL IN THE NEWSPAPER JOHORI ISLAMI SIGNALLED MOUNTING OPPOSITION AMONG SOME IRANIANS TO THE IMMEDIATE RETURN OF THE BODIES DESPITE PRESIDENT ABOLHASSAN BANI-SADR'S PLEDGE TO HAND THEM OVER. AYATOLLAH MOHAMMAD BEHESHTI, ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MEMBERS OF THE RULING REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, SAID IN A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:

"SUCH IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES SHOULD BE DISCUSSED IN THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND IT IS THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL THAT SHOULD DECIDE."

BEHESHTI IS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE HARD-LINE ISLAMIC REPUBLICAN PARTY, IRAN'S LARGEST POLITICAL FACTION. JOHORI ISLAMI IS THE PARTY NEWSPAPER.

BANI-SADR TOLD REPORTERS SATURDAY THE BODIES WILL BE RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES "WITH NO CONDITIONS ATTACHED."

HOWEVER, JOHORI ISLAMI'S EDITORIAL SAID, "THESE BODIES HAVE POLITICAL VALUE FOR US."

IRAN SHOULD DEMAND THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT RELEASE IRANIAN ASSETS NOW FROZEN, IT ADDED. PRESIDENT CARTER FROZE IRANIAN ASSETS IN THE UNITED STATES SHORTLY AFTER THE 50 AMERICAN HOSTAGES WERE SEIZED BY MILITANTS WHO OVERRAN THE U.S. EMBASSY IN TEHRAN 176 DAYS AGO.

THERE WAS NO IMMEDIATE COMMENT FROM BANI-SADR ON THE EDITORIAL OR BEHESHTI'S STATEMENT AND IT WAS UNCLEAR WHETHER THEY WOULD AFFECT A TRANSFER.

THE REMAINS OF THE EIGHT U.S. SERVICEMEN WERE FLOWN TO TEHRAN SUNDAY ABOARD AN ARMY PLANE AFTER BEING RECOVERED AT THE DESERT LANDING SITE SOUTHEAST OF TEHRAN. THE PENTAGON SAID THE MEN DIED WHEN TWO AIRCRAFT COLLIDED AND BURST INTO FLAME AT THE LANDING SITE AFTER PRESIDENT CARTER ORDERED THE RESCUE MISSION SCRUBBED.

FIVE OF THE BODIES WERE REPORTED INTACT BUT ONLY PARTS OF THE REMAINING THREE HAVE BEEN RECOVERED, SOURCES SAID. THEY BODIES WERE SEVERELY BURNED AND ARE UNRECOGNIZABLE, THEY ADDED.